DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 442 116 CS 217 164

AUTHOR Balester, Valerie M.; McDonald, James C.
TITLE Working Together? Relations between Writing Program and Writing Center Directors.
PUB DATE 1999-04-15
NOTE 38p.; Paper presented at the Conference of the National Writing Centers Associations (Bloomington, Indiana, April 15-17, 1999).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Attitudes; *Administrator Role; Higher Education; *Interprofessional Relationship; National Surveys; Occupational Surveys; *Program Administration; *Writing Instruction; *Writing Laboratories
IDENTIFIERS Administrator Surveys

ABSTRACT

A study investigated the working relationship between writing program directors and writing center directors nationally, to develop a picture of such a relationship and to compare the nature and status of the two positions and the backgrounds of the people who hold them. In all, about 650 surveys were distributed to members of professional associations, and useable responses were received from 176 people. Responses suggest that writing program directors regard writing center directors more as partners and less as helpmates than they did in a 1988 study (Olson and Ashton-Jones), and that the relation of the program director to the center director is much more collaborative than supervisory. Often, collaboration and communication can help overcome a lack of power or status in their institutions or a lack of knowledge about composition research, management practices, or institutional politics. Still, survey data suggest that program directors enjoy a more privileged place in college/university structures and that the professionalization of center directors is lagging behind the professionalization of other writing program administrators. Respondents almost never described coming to an agreement about philosophies and goals as a result of collaboration. Many respondents mentioned how important it was for a director in either position to be a scholar in composition studies. (Contains 9 tables, 4 notes, and 27 references. Appended is a sample survey instrument.) (NKA)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
J. McDonald
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

ED 442 116

Working Together? Relations Between Writing Program and Writing Center Directors

Valerie M. Balester, Texas A&M University

James C. McDonald, University of Louisiana at Lafayette

National Writing Centers Association Conference

Bloomington, IN, April 15-18, 1999

The status of WPAs, both writing program directors and writing center directors, in their institutions and in the composition field has been an issue of central concern of the last two decades (see, for example, Janangelo and Hansen, Bishop and Crossley, Bloom, and Janangelo on WPAs as well as North and Wingate on writing centers), leading to the drafting of position statements such as the Portland Resolution, "Evaluating the Work of Writing Program Administration," and "What Lies Ahead for Writing Centers: Position Statement on Professional Concerns" (Simpson). Writing center directors, however, often feel that compositionists, including other WPAs, have particularly neglected the work that they do. The 1989 draft of the "CCCC Statement of Principles and Standards for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing" argued forcefully for the importance of WPA work, especially in tenure and promotion decisions, but, as Valerie Balester pointed out, it overlooked the work of writing centers, presenting them as "supplemental to the English department curriculum, useful for training graduate teaching assistants and lightening the burden on faculty by giving their students individual attention" (167). Muriel Harris has described the frustrations that writing center directors feel when "colleagues in our departments who are otherwise interested in and knowledgeable about the teaching of writing" do not understand the functions and practices of writing centers (19), while Mark L.

CS 217 164

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Waldo's "What Should the Relationship Between the Writing Center and Writing Program Be?" charges that when a writing center is "the service appendage of the writing program," "composition teachers become the elite while center staff become the coolies" (76, 77). Gary A. Olson and Evelyn Ashton-Jones' 1988 survey of 188 first-year composition directors supported these concerns, revealing their tendency to regard center directors "as a kind of wife" (23) and to define their work as mainly service and administration, not as teaching and scholarship, less valuable and less professional than faculty work.

Still, no study has looked closely at how program directors and center directors work together, and although center directors' background and working conditions have been the subject of several surveys (Murray and Banister; Wright; Healy), no previous survey has compared the situations of program directors and center directors. Recent movements to professionalize WPA and writing center work, to define administrative work as scholarship, to appoint composition scholars in WPA positions, and to create free-standing writing programs and writing centers, as well as numerous recent publications urging WPAs to take power and learn to work with other administrators, all should be affecting these two positions and the relationships between them. What do people holding these positions expect from each other, and what working relationships have they forged? How do issues of power, status, and professionalism affect these positions and the relationships between them?

Each of us has directed a writing center and then gone on to direct the first-year writing program at our respective universities. After developing, administering, even nurturing a writing center, we found ourselves to some extent overseeing our successors. We continued to support and nurture the writing center in our new positions but had to work out our relationships with the

new center director, just as we had had to establish a working relationship with the previous program director when we had directed a writing center. Our experiences led us to wonder about the relationship of writing program directors and writing center directors nationally.

With this study, we are interested in developing a picture of the relationship between the foremost writing program director at a college or university and the writing center director. We wanted as well to compare the nature and status of the two positions and the background of the people who hold them, and to see how well they work with each other and how their status, background, and ideas about teaching and administration affect that relationship.

The Survey

We distributed surveys in three ways: a mailing to all members of the National Writing Centers Association and of the Council of Writing Program Administrators, postings on the listservs WPA-L and WCENTER, and distributions at the 1997 CCCC and the 1997 and 1998 NWCA conferences.[1] In all we distributed about 850 surveys, not counting the listserv postings, asking respondents to pass a copy of the questionnaire to their counterpart in the writing program or writing center. We received useable responses from 176 people. The sample therefore is biased in favor of WPAs active in professional associations for writing directors and informed about the scholarship and politics of writing program administration.[2] A larger survey or one with

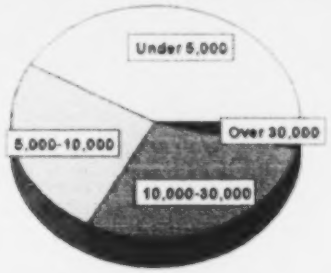
---

[1] We pretested the questionnaire with five writing program directors and five writing center directors, and, after refining the questions before the mailings. After coding many of these responses in a data base, we clarified some items before distributing the surveys through the listservs and at the conferences).

[2] See Gunner on the profiles of WPA members.

responses from a different distribution of institutions and WPAs might well provide a different profile of the two positions and their relationships to each other than we do here. Of the 176 responses to our survey, 61.9% (n=109) came from university faculty and staff, with 23% (n=41) from four-year colleges. Community college administrators represented 10% (n=19) of the responses, while only 1% (n=3) of the responses came from two-year college faculty. We also heard from administrators from one high school, two four-year professional schools, and one four-year technical institute (see Table 1). Forty-one percent (n=72) of the responses came from schools with fewer than 5,000 students, 25% (n=44) from schools with an enrollment between 5,000 and 10,000, and 29% (n=52) from schools with an enrollment of between 10,000 and 30,000. Only 3% (n=6) were from institutions of more than 30,000 students. We received no information about the enrollment of two schools (see Table 2). Sixty-seven percent (n=117) of the respondents were from public institutions, and 33% (n=58) from private (with one not reporting). However, we found no pattern in the data aligning the size or nature of the school or the nature of the position consistently with any one answer to any of the questions.

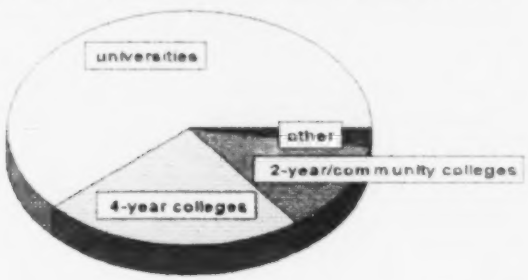
Table 2: Enrollments of respondents' institutions



under 5,000 enrollment: n=72 (41%)
5,000-10,000 enrollment: n=44 (25%)
10,000-30,000 enrollment: n=52 (29%)
over 3,000 enrollment: n=6 (3%)

We solicited information about participants' positions, background and experience, rank,

Table 1: Respondents' institutions



universities: n=109 (62%)
4-year colleges: n=41 (23%)
2-year/community colleges: n=22 (13%)
other institutions: n=4 (2%)

reporting lines, and their working relationships with counterparts (see Appendix for

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

questionnaire). Of our 176 responses, 61 were from writing program directors, 100 from writing center directors, and 15 from those who serve both functions, representing 142 institutions. For purposes of classification, we defined the writing center director to include directors of learning centers that devote significant resources to writing. We defined the writing program director as the primary administrator in charge of the writing courses at an institution. Because the primary writing program director could be anyone from the director of the first-year composition program or of the WAC program to the chair or head of a department or division of English, writing, or humanities, we asked the respondents to identify the primary writing program director themselves if a campus had more than one director of a curriculum of writing courses. Most respondents identified the director of first-year composition courses.

Clearly there are limitations to a survey that asks a WPA to describe a relationship with another WPA in their institution, even with the promise of anonymity. Respondents may be reluctant to criticize a colleague for many reasons, and an outside observer might describe a relationship differently than the participants. Most questions asked for straightforward information about matters such as the WPA's background and education, hiring procedures, and reporting lines, though some questions required more interpretation on the part of the respondents. Our central question, "Describe your working relationship with your counterpart," gave respondents a great deal of latitude in deciding what to reveal.

Information on the Positions

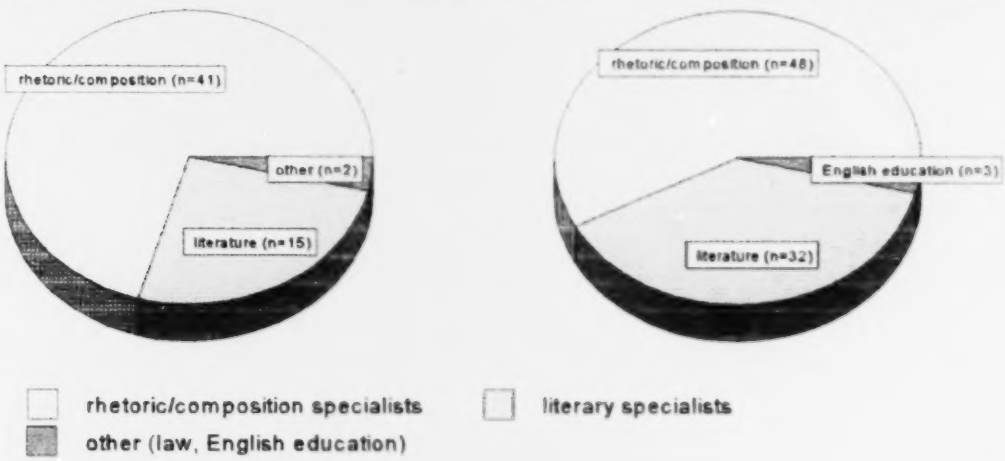
The information respondents provided about their highest degrees and areas of specialty, their previous experience as writing administrators, and the process for hiring or training writing

program or writing center directors provides some indication of the professional status of these positions within their institutions, including the extent to which institutions have been hiring faculty best qualified to serve as WPAs and the extent to which directing a writing center has become a desirable and viable career path.

Writing program directors generally have higher qualifications in rhetoric and composition than writing center directors. Eighty-six percent (53 out of 61) of the surveyed program directors had doctoral degrees (including Ed. D.s), while only 53% of the center directors (51 out of 96) had doctoral degrees. (One program director [1%]) and three center directors [3%] were ABD.) Sixty-seven percent of the program directors (n=41) identified themselves as specialists in rhetoric, composition studies, or composition in conjunction with literature; only 24% (n=15) saw themselves solely as literature specialists, while 3% (n=2) identified law or English education as their academic field. In contrast, 48% (n=48) of the center directors identified their field as composition, 3% (n=3) were in English education with an Ed. D., and 32% (n=32) were specialists primarily in literature. In general, institutions apparently place a higher priority on hiring a composition specialist to run a writing program than to direct a writing center.

Hiring practices as well as degrees and areas of specialization are also important indicators of an institution's view of a WPA position and the qualifications it values. Although there are good reasons to appoint someone from within the institution who knows the program and the institution and although some programs hire several well-qualified composition faculty who take turns in WPA positions, a national search often indicates a desire to find someone highly qualified

Table 3: Specializations of writing program directors and center directors

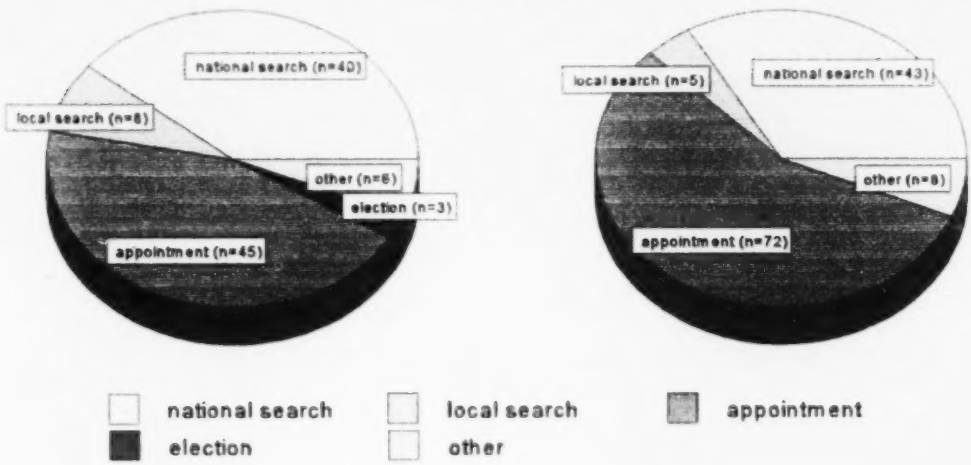


rather than simply to find someone willing to fill a slot. Some respondents, however, apparently had problems answering the question about hiring practices, so answers were sometimes difficult to interpret, and the number of useable responses was low compared to other questions. We asked each respondent to provide information about hiring procedures for both the program director and the center director. But 62 respondents replied for only one position or did not reply at all, and in 93 other cases we were unable to ascertain the method of hiring from the answer, or the respondent claimed not to know. According to the remaining responses, most institutions select someone already at the institution to direct the writing program or run the writing center:

57 program directors and 63 center directors were appointed or elected to their position after an internal search. National searches were conducted to hire 29 program directors and 36 center directors. Regional searches were uncommon, with 3 program directors and 9 center directors selected by this means (see Table 4). The hiring trends for both positions seem similar, with national searches somewhat more common for writing program directors and appointments somewhat more common for writing center directors, but the lower number of useable responses to this question suggests treating such conclusions regarded cautiously.

Given the complexity of writing program administration, professionalization should, but usually does not, include training in non-curricular skills such as budgeting, management, and marketing. Respondents reported that institutions almost never offer anything more than mentoring and/or consultation to train WPAs, a fact, while not surprising, that suggests the vast majority of writing administrators must learn essential skills on the job, often by trial and error.

Table 4: Selection processes for writing program directors and center directors



Since graduate programs in composition or related fields generally also neglect education in the

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

management and administration of writing programs and writing centers, this represents a significant problem for professionalization efforts. One center director ironically wrote of his training, "I got a tour of the building!" while a program director answered the question with "WPA Workshop and Fire. Not in that order." Ten respondents mentioned the annual workshop which the Council for Writing Program Administrators sponsors for new WPAs as important to their preparation for writing administration, underscoring the importance of this workshop given the nationwide neglect of administrative training in institutions and graduate education.

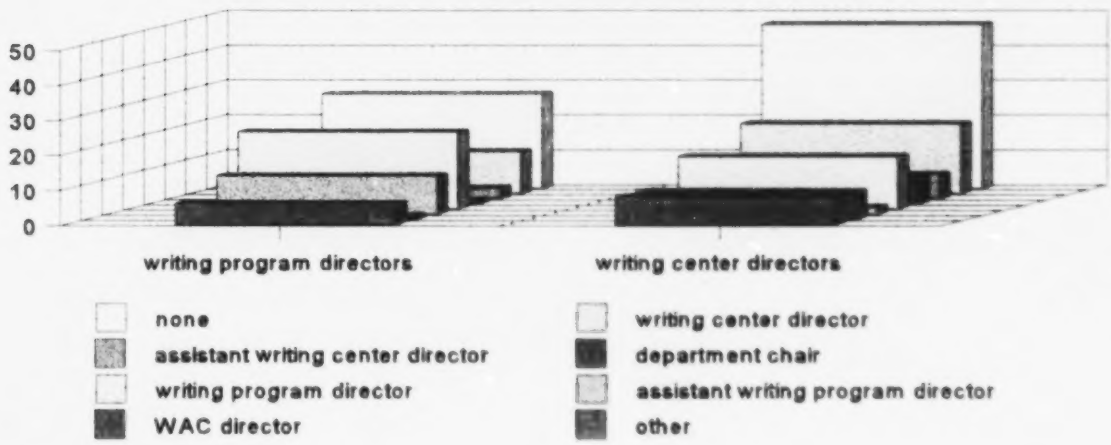
The issue of WPA training is especially important in light of the responses to the question about previous administrative experience. In some sense both positions are often "entry-level" college administrative positions, for almost half the program directors (45%, n=27 of 60) and half the center directors (47%, n=47 of 99 responses) were in their first administrative position. The remaining 55% (n=33) of program directors had held one or more administrative positions before beginning their current position, averaging 2.4 previous administrative positions. Fifty-three percent (n=52) of the center directors had had previous administrative experience, averaging 2.2 previous administrative positions. However, we found that our situation, serving as a center director as preparation for serving as a program director, was atypical; only 12 program directors had been center directors previously (15% of the 78 positions listed), close to the same the number of center directors who had been program directors (15 or 13% of the 114 positions listed).[3] More commonly, program directors had previously held positions as a writing program director or assistant director. Of the 78 positions held previously by program directors, 33 (42%)

[3] Note that these percentages are percentages of all the previous administrative *positions* reported by those who were not in their first WPA position, not percentages of respondents who had held each position.

were writing program positions--22 (28%) directors and 11 (39%) assistant directors. Similarly the normal career path to center directorship, when the position was not entry-level, was previous work as a center director or assistant director. Twenty-eight (24%) of the 114 positions previously held by center directors were in writing centers--17% (n=20) as directors and 7% (n=8) as assistant directors (see Table 5).

Program directors were far more likely to have a tenured or tenure-track faculty position than center directors. While 81% (n=50) of the program directors were tenured or tenure-track, only 17% (n=17) of the center directors were on tenure track. Similarly, while only 18% (n=11)

Table 5: WPAs' previous administrative positions

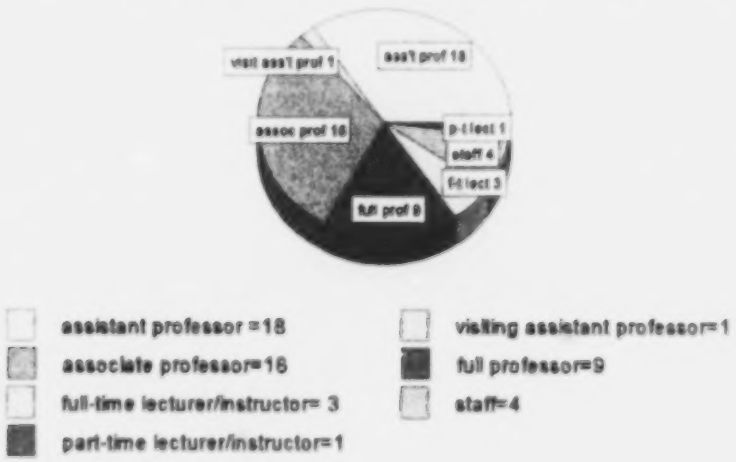


of the program directors reported being non-tenure track, 82% (n=82) of the center directors so reported. There was little difference, however, in the percentages of WPAs in a part-time or full-time lecturer or a visiting faculty position--8% (n=5) of program directors compared to 10% (n=10) of center directors. Frequently center directors held non-tenure-track professorial

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

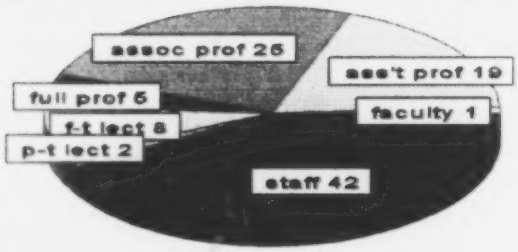
positions: fifteen assistant professors (15%), eight associate professors (8%), and one full professor (1%) were non-tenure track, compared to only two assistant professors (3%) and one associate professor (1%) among the program directors. Another 10% (n=10) of center directors listed other nontenure-track classifications at their institutions, such as "instructor" or "faculty." No one listed graduate student or teaching assistant as their position (see Tables 6 and 7).

Table 7: Ranks of writing program directors



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Table 8: Ranks of writing center directors



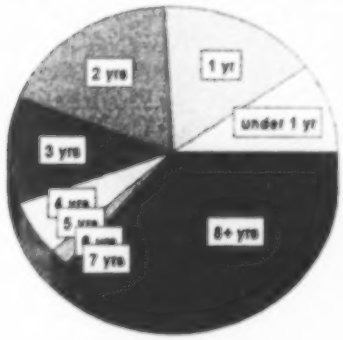
faculty=1
assistant professor 19
associate professor=25
full professor=5
full-time lecturer/instructor=8

The position of writing center director (34%, n=34) was far more frequently classified as staff, professional staff, administrator, or academic professional than the writing program director position (3%, n=2). This is a complicated category regarding status and job security, and our survey did not provide a clear picture about the professional situation of WPAs in this category. These positions sometimes are equivalent in status to a secretary, sometimes to a dean. Usually these positions are not faculty positions and are not tenure track, although one administrator indicated she had tenure. But some of these staff or administrative positions may be more desirable than a faculty position. One respondent indicated that she had been Acting Director and Interim Director of the writing center at her institution as a graduate student, and when she completed her Ph. D., the center directorship was changed from a tenure-track to a non-tenure-track position so that her department could hire one of its graduates as Director, at a salary considerably below most faculty pay. Several years later, she filed a grievance to get salary

commensurate with her duties and qualifications and, after extensive and complicated negotiations, the position was changed to 76% administrative, 24% part-time lecturer, non-tenure track, to accommodate her demands. This solution sidestepped the tenure process but acknowledged her exemplary administration, teaching, and scholarship. This story illustrates how fluid the nature of a writing center directorship can be in an institution and how difficult it can be to assess the position of a director based on faculty or nonfaculty status.

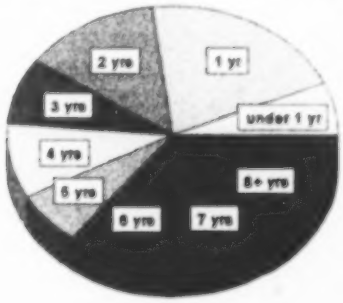
Fifty-two of 61 program directors and 82 of 100 center directors answered the question about how long they have held their current position, although the design of the questionnaire made it easy to overlook this question. A little over half of both the program directors (53%, n=28) and the center directors (52%, n=43) were relatively new in their positions (three years or fewer), indicating frequent turnover in both positions. Only 15% (n=8) of the program directors compared to 33% of the center directors held the position for at least four but no more than eight years. Those figures were almost reversed for WPAs in their current position for more than eight years. 31% (n=15) of the program directors and 14% (n=13) of the center directors have held their present position over eight years. Writing program directors, in general, have made longer careers in their positions than center directors; the mean for writing program directors was three years, while for writing center directors, the mean was two years. The most common time in the position for a program director seems to be about four years. Of the 16 program directors who have been in their positions for eight or more years, only one was not tenure track (an administrator at a community college that does not grant tenure). In contrast, only four of the long-term center directors were tenured or tenure-track, while eight were non-tenure track.

Table 9: Years in current position--writing program directors



under 1 year=5	1 year=8	2 years=9
3 years=6	4 years=3	5 years=1
6 years=2	7 years=1	8 or more years=15

Years in current position--writing center directors



under 1 year=5	1 year=15	2 years=10
3 years=6	4 years=7	5 years=5
6 years=8	7 years=5	8 or more years=13

However, these long-term writing center directors without tenure often wrote that they had professional status and job security "equal" to tenure-track faculty (see Table 9).

The information provided by our respondents strongly suggests that institutions tend to grant writing program directors more status than writing center directors, often significantly

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

more. While many colleges and universities require their writing program director to have a doctorate and to specialize in composition studies, many of the same institutions do not expect the same from their writing center director. Despite the fact a number of writing center directors hold powerful and prestigious nonfaculty positions, the percentage of center directors with faculty or tenure status is disturbingly low given concerns that the teaching and scholarship involved in directing a writing center often go unnoticed. Our study, however, does suggest improvements in writing center director positions compared to earlier surveys, and comparisons to previous studies may well suggest gains in the professional status for WPAs in general. That almost half the WPAs in this study were in their first administrative position, that these positions experience frequent turnover, and that most these WPAs receive little formal training in management and administration before beginning WPA work suggest that too many WPAs are not prepared for their positions. It is not surprising that administrators with little training in administration often feel powerless and marginalized in their positions.

The Relationships

Eighty-four of the 100 writing center directors and 60 of the 61 writing program directors surveyed described their relationship with their counterpart and did so in overwhelmingly positive terms. Sixty-five percent (n=94) of all 144 useable responses were entirely positive (often glowing) about the relationship, and there was no difference here between the responses of program directors and center directors: 65% of the program directors and 65% of the center directors seemed very satisfied with the working relationship with their counterpart. Twenty-three percent of the center directors and 22% of the program directors wrote generally

positive descriptions of their relationships but also expressed some complaints, usually a desire for more collaboration, more opportunities to work together, or more knowledge of composition studies for the other director. Only 10% of the center director responses and 15% of the program director responses (or 12½% of the total responses) were dominated by descriptions of problems or frustrations.

Most of the descriptions expressed a strong collaborative ethic about administrative work. In this sense, the respondents echoed Waldo and Wingate, who both argue that writing center directors need to enter into collaborative relationships with other administrators, especially the writing program director. In contrast to a model in which the writing center takes care of students' grammar problems in order to free classroom teachers to use a process pedagogy, Waldo argues that the writing program and the writing center need "a common theoretical perspective" and should have an "equal," even "symbiotic" relationship (74, 75). The most common descriptive terms in the respondents' positive comments were "collaborative effort," "supportive," "work[ing] collaboratively and harmoniously," "shar[ing] goals," "good communication," "collegial," "respect[ing] each other's territory," "close contact," "trust," and "work[ing] together to solve problems." Most complaints about these relationships mentioned lack of contact or communication between the two WPAs or differences in perspectives or expertise regarding composition instruction. Another set of phrases that appeared almost as frequently--"clear division of responsibilities," "autonomy," "agreeing about roles," and "respect for territory"--implies limits to collaboration and sometimes complementary approaches to working with others smoothly and effectively within a hierarchical structure. The success of the relationship between the two WPAs may depend on how they are able to develop a sense of

collaboration while also respecting each other's territory in a hierarchical, often confusing university administrative structure.

The relationship between the writing program director and the writing center director is in part a function of the location of the two positions in this structure. Waldo argues that when a center director must report to a program director, it is difficult for them to maintain an equal relationship between the program and the center. Wingate also claims that "honest and trusting collaboration becomes more difficult when one collaborator has significantly more power" (101). In order to determine the reporting lines for the writing center director, we listed several administrative officers and asked respondents to check any administrator that the center director reports to and to indicate the primary reporting line. A follow-up question asked respondents to explain who has the authority to make important decisions for the writing center. Twenty-five of the 59 program directors (42%) who answered this question said they report primarily to one person, most often a department chair or head, a dean, or a vice-president or provost. Thirty-five of the center directors (35%) report to primarily one person, but this was most often not a program director but a department chair or head, a dean, a learning skills, or a similar director. Program directors seldom were cited as a center director's main supervisor: only three center directors mentioned reporting only to or primarily to a program director. Thirty respondents (30%) cited a program director or first-year composition director as one of the center director's reporting lines. In most cases, then, the writing center director is not institutionally subordinate to a writing program director, even though the writing program director may often have a higher rank or a higher position in the administrative structure.

Other responses showed that WPAs center directors often must contend with complex, frequently confusing reporting lines. Many report to two or three people: 31 (52½%) of the program directors and 57 (57%) of center directors. However, the situation is even more complicate for some center directors. Eight center directors reported primarily to four or more people. And three had five or more primary reporting lines. Some reported to one person regarding budget and equipment, another regarding staffing, and perhaps another regarding pedagogy and policy (although most typically the center director acts autonomously in this last area). Although the numerous administrators to which a center director reports may provide a number of allies, it is difficult to see this situation as beneficial overall to writing center directors. Still, most respondents reported that the center director had the most authority for making important decisions regarding writing center policy, budget, and personnel, and at times this authority is shared with a program director or a committee.

Despite the different places of program directors and center directors in the college and university structures, respondents' descriptions of the personal relations between the two WPAs often echoed each other. Positive descriptions of relationships often mentioned sharing similar goals and assumptions about teaching and management; respecting each other's authority and knowledge; supporting one another emotionally, politically, and often materially; having a strong personal relationship or friendship; and, most persistently, maintaining close contact and collaboration. For example, one program director wrote, "The Writing Center coordinator and I work collaboratively and harmoniously. We share similar goals and strategies for working. Yes, I am satisfied with the relationship; we are mutually supportive." A center director noted, "Our relationship is excellent--collegial, productive, mutually supportive." Occasionally, a feeling of

"us" versus the institution helped forge a strong relationship between writing administrators: "We are . . . our own support group, being the only two untenured administrators in the department and two of only four composition specialists in the department."

While "communication" and "collaboration" were the most frequently occurring terms in the positive comments, communication problems, lack of contact, and a sense of being "oversupervised" were most often mentioned as problems in the relationships. When someone mentioned a complaint in a generally positive description, the problem often involved a desire for greater communication or collaboration. One center director who described the relationship as "Fine" wrote: "We have a lot of confidence in each other. . . . [T]here are times when we should communicate more. [The program director] seems very supportive, though." The most negative comments expressed little trust of one WPA toward another, some respondents describing their counterpart as "paranoid" or "insecure."

Often, center directors credited the program director's open-door policy for helping to build a positive working relationship: "We just talk when something comes up," wrote one. Wrote another, "I feel that [the writing program director] is very approachable and that I can go to her for questions and concerns." But when lack of time, overwork, or physical distance between offices makes spontaneous, informal discussion difficult, the working relations seem to suffer unless formal lines of communication are established. One center director wrote, "We have an excellent working relationship--though the way our duties are organized, we have little occasion to work together. We are both on the English Department Writing Committee as ex officio members." One program had recently appointed a teaching assistant to serve as a liaison between the writing program and the writing center to improve communication and collaboration.

Not surprisingly, maintaining communication was often a problem when the writing center and the writing program were located in different departments or divisions. "We work well together," one program director wrote sarcastically about the director of a learning center located outside the English department. "I tell him everything. He tells me nothing." One center director wrote of the relationship, "We are housed in different divisions. Frequently the Writing Program Coordinator forgets to inform the writing center of important decisions. Currently, we have a good working relationship. It does take extra effort, though." Another explained, "I've had no official contact with the Director of our Writing Lab. . . . We are actually making the interactions between the English Department and the Writing Lab the focus of our Composition staff meetings this semester."

Agreement concerning the function and goals of writing programs and writing centers, theories about and approaches to writing instruction, management styles, and the role of the writing center were frequently mentioned by respondents; establishing an effective collaborative working relationship apparently depended on shared assumptions. "We are independent yet tend to think alike," one program director wrote. "We have an excellent working relationship, share similar goals and ideals, and work together with what support we have," another program director wrote, echoing many others. Similarly, a center director wrote: "We work well together. We consider ourselves a team (Writing Center staff, English faculty, and supervisors) and have a great relationship. I have freedom to create, develop the Center, but I have total support to put ideas into place." The program director at her university, chair of a department of writing, claimed:

> We work closely together and our Writing Center is the best in the country, certainly in part because [she] is the best director. In addition, we have the best

> support staff, instructors, and peer tutors. The Writing Center is a very important support service to our college, and we treat it that way.
>
> She is a wonderful colleague and an excellent Writing Center Director. I have complete trust in her ability to manage the facility. We openly discuss issues or changes, and we work together to solve problems. In turn, [she] is very supportive of the department and institution.

Several respondents, echoing Waldo's concerns, were unhappy when the program and the center differed seriously in their perspectives about writing instruction or the function of a writing center. They complained about perceptions of the writing center as a place that primarily provides remedial instruction. One director commented, "While the English department seems to find 'worth' in the writing center, I believe that they may unknowingly perpetuate the stereotype that writing centers are only for poor writers."

Respondents sometimes wrote that hiring practices and background in composition studies often helped determine how well the two WPAs worked together, suggesting that they may view agreement about fundamental goals, roles, pedagogical practices, and management styles as a precondition for collaboration rather than a result of collaboration. One center director mentioned that serving on the hiring committee for the program director was an important "opportunity to choose the person I could work most effectively with." Several respondents claimed that the two WPAs need to share a background in rhetoric and composition in order to establish common ground. Some were able to extend their collaboration into their research, co-authoring articles and conference presentations, because they shared research interests in composition. Conversely, lack of a composition studies background was reported as a hindrance

to the working relationship. One writing center director wrote that the program director "has been pretty much paranoid about the fact that I am active in the profession (and he is not, never has been), so while we play the usual academic cordiality game on the outside, I pretty much leave him alone." Similarly, one program director mentioned the center director's degree in special education as a possible source of her insecurity and unresponsiveness to the program director's suggestions. Another program director wrote that the learning center director, while "notably cooperative" with "good impulses," was "not a specialist in writing" nor was she likely to develop such an interest. Consequently, the program director stated, "the writing program does not lean heavily on what is offered in the Learning Center." In this case, the hiring process for the writing center director and a problem in the working relationship between the two WPAs were linked to the marginalization of the writing center from the writing program.

A few responses, however, suggested that if one WPA lacked a background in composition, a program director and a center director could still work well together if they shared goals and established a strong personal relationship, and many respondents indicated that their collaborative working relationship was helped by a strong personal relationship or friendship. "We have similar goals for both programs (not exactly the same) and are agreed that we want to work together," wrote one center director. "I like him as a person, which helps. It would be great if he had more of an interest in composition/rhetoric as a field, but of course, as with all of us, his available time and research funds are limited." But sometimes lack of shared knowledge was reported as a problem in establishing common goals or in developing a productive personal or professional working relationship. And one center director stated that more than friendship was necessary to create a good working relationship: "The writing program director and I have a good

personal relationship but the communication lines re writing program and policy have been weak. This year the Writing Program Director made changes that include my participation." Friendship was not enough to establish communication; procedural changes were necessary.

Respondents' frequent mention of respect for each other's "territory," however, implies limits to their sense of collaboration. Respect for territory generally implied respect for the other's authority, and without this, attempts to work together could be perceived as interference, oversupervision, or dependence.[4] One program director described friction with the center director in terms of "turf": "Close personal relationship, sometimes a bit tense over turf and public image, but mostly pretty much OK." A few responses explicitly defined the territory of the writing center, reflecting a reciprocal relationship between the two directors. The chair of a new department of writing reported, "We are working on our roles. The writing center director has autonomy in the center. She hires, fires, trains and sets policy. I see my role as providing resources, finding new resources, and publicizing the writing center's role in the university." Another program director wrote about his relationship to a writing center director who had recently resigned:

> Although we spoke frequently, I wasn't happy with the WC Director's work. Too often she came to me for permission to do things that she should have taken full authority about (or worse, went to the department head). I had to field complaints about the Writing Center and deal with computer problems there too often. Where we worked well together was on budget matters, the WC Director coming to me

[4] See Wingate for another take on problematic kinds of collaboration between administrators.

> for advice or help with a budget shortfall, sometimes with me going to the dean with a request from the writing program. No serious problems about pedagogy--the WC Director made those decisions, and I would have concurred most of the time.

Although few respondents outlined what they conceived as their roles and the roles of their counterparts so fully, a pattern of expectations, roles, and responsibilities emerged in the relationships that many respondents described or desired between the program director and center director, especially when the writing center director reported to the program director or depended on the program director for resources, faculty support, or other needs.

At a minimum, writing center directors usually expected the program director to respect the autonomy of the writing center to set policies, establish the pedagogical principles of the writing center, and train tutors. Failure to recognize the director's authority and autonomy at times was regarded as an intrusion into the center director's territory. Most program directors who discussed this matter, like the department chair and the program director quoted above, also expected the center director to establish the writing center's policies and principles and to develop a tutor-training program. A writing center director who did not make these decisions independently might be seen as too dependent, intruding on the program director's time and creating unnecessary work for the program director. This sense of the center director's autonomy, however, could present a problem when the program director and center director did not share similar pedagogical principles; attempts to bridge such differences could be seen as incursions into the center director's territory. One program director wrote, "I feel that I have a good working relationship with the WC Director and can trust that the decisions made in that area

will complement the goals in my program." One can imagine the problems that could exist if the writing center director's decisions did not reflect the writing program's goals.

Outside this territory, writing center directors at times expressed a desire for "support" from the writing program director. Often "support" seemed to refer mainly to emotional support and to counsel and collaboration about strategies to solve problems, improve the writing center, or change faculty perceptions about the center. As one center director wrote, "I have a great deal of autonomy, and mostly I view my [program] director as a source of support and good advice on writing center matters." Several center directors discussed support in more tangible terms, however, expecting program directors to help promote the writing center and change faculty perceptions about the center or to help provide resources for the center. Encouraging students to visit the writing center and promoting the center with composition faculty were taken as visible signs of the program director's interest in and support of the writing center. One center director discussed support of the writing center almost entirely in terms of the program director's support in changing faculty perceptions.

> I receive adequate support. It could be better. I'd like more ties to the writing center from all English 101-102 teachers. Before I came, the center was remedial only. Given our limited funds, it is very difficult to change that conception (even though I was hired to do just that!) But I think these things will take some time. I've seen steady improvements.

When the director reported to a program director, center directors sometimes expected material support from the program director, and the ability or inability of a program director to provide resources was a recurring theme in the comments of center directors. Program directors,

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

however, seldom mentioned providing resources for the writing center as one of their responsibilities. The department chair that did mention "providing resources [and] finding new resources" for the writing center as part of his role likely had access to funds as department chair that other program directors may not have. Without a budget, a program director still might take the responsibility of trying to obtain resources from others for the writing center, like the program director who sometimes made budget requests to his dean on behalf of the writing center, and it's likely that some respondents had budget and resources problems partly in mind when they mentioned collaborating to find solutions to problems. Program directors, however, might also reasonably believe that acquiring funds and resources should be a responsibility of the center director, depending on the status and experience of the center director, or of another administrator, such as a department chair. But being able to provide material support, or at least making a good effort to do so, was important in several center directors' positive descriptions of their relationships with the program director. For example, one center director wrote that the program director "is responsive to my requests, encourages my ideas about change and growth, and goes to bat for me concerning equipment upgrades and budget requests." But if the program director did not or could not provide enough resources for the writing center, whether or not the program director had the power and resources to make or influence budget decisions, the relationship often suffered: "while I have her verbal support," wrote one center director, "it would be nice to have some help." One reason why program directors and center directors can have problems establishing regular lines of communication when they are housed in different parts of a university may be that this arrangement removes a pressing need for the two directors to speak with each other: to acquire funds and resources for the writing center.

While writing center directors generally looked to program directors for support, resources, and help in solving some problems, writing program directors often wrote that center directors should be responsible for the center operations, open to communication and collaboration, "receptive to suggestions," and "enthusiastic about trying new things." Several enjoyed working closely with the writing center director, sometimes as friends and close collaborators on several projects. "I am extremely fortunate to have a great working relationship with the WC director," wrote one program director:

> We confer on all kinds of things related to both the WP and the WC. We feel the two positions/directors must have close contact. The WC director and I are good friends; we eat lunch together, assist each other with workshops, meetings, flyers, etc. This semester, we are teaching linked courses: she has a tutor-training course that meets with my first-year comp. course. I can't imagine a better working relationship between a WP and WC director.

Several program directors, in fact, said that they frequently look to the center director for assistance with program activities such as TA training, workshops, and faculty outreach. Most program directors, however, were satisfied with their relationship if the center director ran the writing center competently and independently and communicated effectively with the program director. For the most part, by effective communication, program directors meant informing the program director about the writing center and being able to consult each other for advice, although some responses suggested a less reciprocal consulting relationship, mentioning only how important it was that the center director consult the program director for advice. For example, one program director wrote, "We work closely together on all matters pertaining to the

composition program. We co-direct the WAC Program. WC Director has full responsibility for the center but keeps me informed and consults with me when necessary." Another program director stated, "Our relationship is good, though she runs the operation fully herself. We do talk when help or advice is needed. She also has an excellent relationship with the first-year comp director, whom she work for two years as assistant to--just before her appointment as WC director. We could have more official connections but it's not essential." Both responses stress the importance for the program director of relying on the center director to run the writing center independently but to keep the program director informed about appropriate writing center matters and to be able to consult each other when necessary. Another program director who wrote of having "a very close working relationship" with the center director complained only that "I get little or no info on the Writing Center because the director has a reserved style and does not share info easily. We nonetheless have a very positive relationship."

Some program directors, however, desired a more activist role in their consultations about the writing center that allowed them to make suggestions for the writing center. One program director wrote of her relations with the center director, "We have a very good working relationship, and I think we each support the other. Her scholarship is not in writing center theory or related issues, which I regret, however, she is enthusiastic about trying new things (an OWL, evening tutoring, class-linked tutoring, etc.) when I suggest them. She is an excellent administrator and trains tutors well." The comments of some center directors suggest that some of them may have regarded such suggestions from the program director as an intrusion into the center director's territory, the center director and the program director having established different boundaries and bridges between their territories. Another program director complained

that the writing center director is "[n]ot always receptive to suggestions made regarding needed services, approaches, etc. But she at least will talk with us." This relationship, the director wrote, was "strained in that the WC Director is insecure and somewhat pompous. Her degree is in special education." The personality conflict and strain in their relationship may have made it difficult for the two WPAs to create a collaborative relationship and negotiate territorial boundaries that allowed the program director to make suggestions for the writing center without seeming intrusive.

Conclusion

The responses to our questions about the relationships between writing program directors and writing center directors suggest that writing program directors regard writing center directors more as partners and less as helpmates than they did in Olson and Ashton-Jones' 1988 study and that the relation of the program director to the center director is much more collaborative than supervisory. Collaboration and communication, many respondents believe, enable them to accomplish their goals more effectively, by pooling their knowledge and political savvy and by presenting a united front. These WPAs try to establish collaborative working relationships with each other in order to minimize the hierarchical nature of academic administrative structure. Often, they see collaboration and communication as a means to overcome potentially destructive differences in power and status between them. This is a strategy that can help overcome a lack of power or status in their institutions or a lack of knowledge about composition research, management practices, or institutional politics.

Still, the survey data suggest that program directors enjoy a more privileged place in college and university structures and that the professionalization of writing center directors is lagging behind the professionalization of other WPA positions. Writing program directors were more likely to be in a tenure-line position, more likely to be a composition specialist, and far more likely to have faculty status. In addition, there are indications that WPAs may often define the territorial boundaries of the writing program and of the writing center in ways that permit and encourage the program director to make suggestions for the writing center but may discourage the center director from trying to exert as much influence on the writing program. Some writing center directors participated in the writing program by conducting workshops, taking part in orientation for teaching assistants, and participating on committees, while some writing program directors might suggest ideas for changing the writing center, such as establishing an on-line writing center, and were pleased or disappointed at how willing the center director was to pursue such ideas.

More frequently, however, WPAs seemed to define their territories that discouraged them from becoming involved in the policies and practices in each other's domain. Their ability to collaborate in such a way that the writing program and writing center could support each other and develop and maintain consistent pedagogical goals and philosophies usually depended on their holding similar knowledge and ideas about composition. Respondents almost never described coming to an agreement about philosophies and goals as a result of their collaboration. And when the two WPAs had a fundamental disagreement over goals and philosophies (for example, over whether the writing center should focus on grammatical errors), the writing center might have an uneasy, even marginal position in the composition curriculum. In order to assure agreement

about basic goals and philosophies, many respondents mentioned how important it was for a WPA in either position to be a scholar in composition studies, even though one-fourth of the program directors and one-third of the center directors were literary scholars. To accomplish this, many departments need to change their hiring patterns, either to conduct national searches for both writing program directors and writing center directors or, if the WPA is to be appointed or elected from the existing faculty in the department, to hire a greater number of composition specialists on the faculty to ensure a good pool of potential WPAs to select from.

Because over half the program directors and center directors in our survey were first-time administrators with little or no training in management and administration, it is important that graduate programs in rhetoric to begin to provide some training in administration and that institutions take more responsibility in preparing and training faculty for administrative positions. Center directors often expected program directors that they report to act as problem solvers, especially in supplying writing centers with needed resources, but when both WPAs are inexperienced, as is often the case, they must try to solve problems, or even decide whether to ignore the problem, based on limited knowledge of the workings and politics of their institution. Inexperienced and untrained in the ways of administration, program and center directors easily become frustrated. Supporting each other emotionally and putting their heads together to develop strategies for dealing with problems in such situations becomes mainly a survival strategy. Clearly, collaboration should be more than that.

Works Cited

Balester, Valerie. "Revising the 'Statement': On the Work of Writing Centers." *CCC* 43 (May 1992): 167-71.

Bishop, Wendy, and Gay Lynn Crossley. "How to Tell a Story of Stopping: The Complexities of Narrating a WPA's Experience." *WPA* 19 (Spring 1996): 70-79.

Bloom, Lynn Z. "I Want a Writing Program Director." *CCC* 43 (May 1992): 176-79.

"Evaluating the Work of Writing Program Administration." *WPA* 22 (Fall/Winter 1998): 85-104.

Boehm, Diane. "Traditional Criteria: Solution or Stumbling Block?" *WPA* 20 (Spring 1997): 17-19.

Chase, Geoffrey. "Redefining Composition, Managing Change, and the Role of the WPA." *WPA* 21 (Fall 1997): 46-54.

Duffey, Suellynn. "Whose Work?" *WPA* 20 (Spring 1997): 19-20.

Faigley, Lester. "Writing Centers in Times of Whitewater." *WCJ* 19 (Fall/Winter 1998): 7-18.

Gunner, Jeanne. "Identity and Location: A Study of WPA Models, Memberships, and Agendas." *WPA* 22 (Spring 1999): 31-54.

Harris, Muriel. "What's Up and What's In: Trends and Traditions in Writing Centers." *WCJ* 11 (Fall/Winter 1990): 15-25.

Haviland, Carol Peterson, Maria Notarangelo, Lene Whitley-Putz, and Thia Wolf, eds. *Weaving Knowledge Together: Writing Centers and Collaboration*. Emmitsburg, MD: NWCA P, 1998.

Healy, Dave. "Writing Center Directors: An Emerging Portrait of the Profession." *WPA* 18 (Spring 1995): 26-43.

Hult, Christine, et al. "The Portland Resolution." *WPA* 16 (1992): 88-94.

Janangelo, Joseph. "Somewhere Between Disparity and Despair: Writing Program Administrators, Image Problems, and *The MLA Job Information List*." *WPA* 15 (Fall/Winter 1991): 60-66.

Janangelo, Joseph, and Kristine Hansen, eds. *Resituating Writing: Constructing and Administering Writing Programs*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton, 1995.

Kinkead, Joyce A., and Jeanette G. Harris. *Writing Centers in Context: Twelve Case Studies*. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1993.

Murray, Patricia Y., and Linda Bannister. "The Status and Responsibilities of Writing Lab Directors: A Survey." *WLN* 9.6 (1985): 10-11.

North, Stephen. "The Idea of a Writing Center." *CE* 46 (Sept. 1984): 433-46.

---. "Revisiting 'The Idea of a Writing Center.'" *WCJ* 15 (Fall 1995): 7-19.

Olson, Gary and Evelyn Ashton-Jones. "Writing Center Directors: The Search for Professional Status." *WPA* 12 (Fall/Winter 1988): 433-36.

Simpson, Jeanne H. "What Lies Ahead for Writing Centers: Position Statement on Professional Concerns." *WCJ* 5.2/6.1 (1985): 35-59. Rpt. *Landmark Essays on Writing Centers*. Ed. Christina Murphy and Joe Law. Davis, CA: Hermagoras, 1995. 57-61.

"Statement of Principles and Standards for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing." *CCC* 40 (Oct. 1989): 329-36.

Sunstein, Bonnie. "Moveable Feasts, Liminal Spaces: Writing Centers and the State of In-Betweenness." *WCJ* 18 (Spring/Summer 1998): 7-26.

Waldo, Mark L. "What Should the Relationship Between the Writing Center and Writing Program Be?" *WCJ* 11 (Fall/Winter 1990): 73-80.

White, Edward. "Use It or Lose It: Power and the WPA." *WPA* 15 (Fall/Winter 1991): 3-12.

Wingate, Molly. "The Politics of Collaboration: Writing Centers Within Their Institutions." In Janangelo and Hansen. 100-7.

Wright, Sharon. "Mapping Diversity: Writing Center Survey Results." *WLN* 18.10 (June 1994): 1-4.

Appendix: Survey Instrument

Survey Concerning Writing Center/Writing Programs Relations

With this survey, we hope to learn more about how writing centers and their directors work in relationship to writing programs administrators. In particular, we are investigating the official institutional relationship and the personal working relationship between the writing center directors and the writing program directors nationwide.

If you are a writing program director or a writing center director (and do not hold both positions jointly), please complete this survey. DO NOT USE THE REPLY OPTION TO ANSWER THIS SURVEY. SEND YOUR RESPONSES OFF LIST TO:
Valerie Balester (v-balester@tamu.edu) OR James McDonald (jcm5337@usl.edu)
Results of the final study will be presented at the CCCC in March 1997.
ALL PERSONAL OR IDENTIFYING INFORMATION WILL BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL.
Definitions
Writing Program Director: The primary administrator in charge of a writing program at an institution; the person whose job title indicates that his/her primary responsibility is to administrate writing courses; the administrator under the level of Head or Chair with the most authority for making decisions about the institution's writing program, whether that program consists only of one first-year writing course or multiple writing courses that undergraduate students over several semesters or other variations. The WP Director position does not exist at every institution. At some, the WP Director position may be held by the Director of WAC, Director of a program or division.

Writing Center Director: The primary administrator in charge of the operation of a writing center, writing lab, or learning center that tutors students on writing assignments. The Writing Center Director may or may not have primary responsibility for making decisions about the center's operation.

1. Name and current position (including title and dates held)
2. Institution
3. Type of institution (community college/ 4-year college/ university/ public/ private)
4. Number of undergraduate students at the institution
5. Your rank, tenure status, highest degree, and area of specialization
6. Previous writing administration positions you have held, including the title, dates, and institution of each position.
7. How is the writing center director selected at your institution? The WP Director?
8. What, if any, orientation or on-the-job training is provided for a new writing center director? For a new WP Director?
9. To whom does the writing center director report in your institution? Mark all that apply, and indicate with an asterisk (*) which the WC director works most closely with.

___ Dean
___ Vice-president for Academic Affairs or Provost
___ Department Chair or Head
___ Division Head (e.g., Division of Writing and Rhetoric, Humanities Division)
___ Writing Program Director
___ First-Year Composition Director
___ WAC Program Director
___ Other _____
Comments/Clarifications on reporting lines:

10. Who has the authority to make the major decisions for the writing center, including staffing, budget, policies, pedagogy, assessment, and equipment decisions? How are these decisions made and carried out?
11A. If you are a writing program director, describe your personal working relationship with the writing center director. Are you satisfied with the relationship? Do you feel you receive adequate support?

11B. If you are a writing center director, describe your personal working relationship with the writing program director. Are you satisfied with the relationship? Do you feel you receive adequate support?
12. Please provide a phone number, e-mail address, or snail mail address for your counterpart (Writing Center Director or Writing Program Director) so that we may ask him or her to fill in a survey.

Thank you for your help.
SEND YOUR RESPONSES OFF LIST TO:
Valerie Balester (v-balester@tamu.edu) OR James McDonald (jcm5337@usl.edu). If you prefer to send your response by mail, the address is: Valerie Balester
Department of English
Texas A&M University
College Station, TX 77843-4227

James McDonald
Department of English
P. O. Drawer 44691
University of Southwestern Louisiana
Lafayette, LA 70504-4691
If you prefer to reach us by phone, e-mail James McDonald (jcm5337@usl.edu) for a toll- free number.
ALL PERSONAL OR IDENTIFYING INFORMATION WILL BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL. BY ANSWERING THIS SURVEY, I UNDERSTAND THAT MY RESPONSES MAY BE QUOTED OR PARAPHRASED, BUT WITHOUT IDENTIFYING INFORMATION.